A Fully Determined Scalar-Tensor Extension of General Relativity:

Singularity Avoidance and First-Order Phase Transition at $r = 2r_s$, with Kerr Extension

Judicael Brindel
Independent Researcher, Cotonou, Benin
ORCID: 0009-0007-4590-9874

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Abstract

We construct a scalar-tensor extension of general relativity in which a thermal scalar field $T(r)$, derived from the Unruh effect near black hole horizons, couples to the Schwarzschild geometry via a fully covariant action. The field profile $T(r) = A/\sqrt{r - r_s}$ is a self-consistent stationary solution of the curved-space Klein–Gordon equation for an effective potential $V_{\text{eff}}(T)$ entirely determined by the geometry. The stationarity condition fixes the conversion threshold $T_c = A/\sqrt{r_s}$ without free parameters, yielding:

$$r_{\text{conv}} = 2r_s \quad \text{(Schwarzschild)}.$$

The matter–field coupling constant κ is fixed by requiring consistency with the Hawking temperature, giving $\kappa = 8\pi G^5 M^5 k_B^3/(15\hbar^2 c^{13})$. The model is *fully determined* by M alone. The phase transition at $r = 2r_s$ is proven *first-order* from $V'''_{\text{eff}}(T_c) \neq 0$, implying a latent heat powering the outgoing flux. All three energy conditions are satisfied; backreaction corrections scale as $(\ell_P/r_s)^2$. We further show that the correlation length of quantum fluctuations of the thermal field at the conversion surface satisfies $\xi_c \sim \ell_P$ — the Planck length emerges from TCG without external input from quantum gravity. TCG defines its own ultraviolet cutoff. We extend the model to Kerr geometry: in the equatorial plane, $r_{\text{conv}}^{\text{Kerr}} = r_+ + \sqrt{r_s^2 - 4a^2}$, and the full angular dependence produces an oblate conversion surface with polar–equatorial asymmetry $\delta r(\theta) \sim a^2 \sin^2\theta/r_s^2$, testable with the Event Horizon Telescope. This paper is explicitly speculative.

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1 Motivation and Context

The Schwarzschild metric,

$$ds^2 = -\left(1 - \frac{r_s}{r}\right) c^2 dt^2 + \left(1 - \frac{r_s}{r}\right)^{-1} dr^2 + r^2 d\Omega^2, \qquad r_s = \frac{2GM}{c^2}, \tag{1}$$

produces a physical singularity at $r = 0$ where all curvature invariants diverge and general relativity breaks down.

We propose that this breakdown is a consequence of an omission: temperature is never treated as a dynamical degree of freedom of the geometry. Near the horizon the Unruh temperature $T_U(r) \to \infty$, yet $g_{\mu\nu}$ does not depend on T. We introduce a scalar thermal field $T(r)$ whose profile is fixed by the Unruh effect and whose dynamics are governed by a covariant action. The consistency condition — that the profile satisfy its own field equation — determines all geometric parameters without free input. The remaining coupling constant κ is fixed by requiring consistency with the independently derived Hawking temperature. The model is then *fully determined* by M alone.

1.1 Relation to scalar-tensor theories

This model belongs to the class of scalar-tensor modifications of general relativity. The scalar field is not introduced ad hoc: it is the near-horizon thermal field, derived from the Unruh effect, promoted to a dynamical degree of freedom. Standard general relativity is recovered exactly for $T \ll T_c$. This paper is self-contained and does not require the Penetron framework [1].

2 The Scalar Thermal Field and Covariant Action

2.1 Profile from the Unruh effect

The proper acceleration of a static observer at radius r is $a(r) = (GM/r^2)(1 - r_s/r)^{-1/2}$. In the near-horizon limit the Unruh temperature reduces to

$$T_U(r) \approx \frac{A}{\sqrt{r - r_s}}, \qquad \boxed{A = \frac{\hbar c^3}{8\pi\, GM\, k_B \sqrt{r_s}}.} \tag{2}$$

We promote T_U to a dynamical scalar field $T = T(r)$.

2.2 Covariant action

$$S = \frac{c^4}{16\pi G} \int d^4x \sqrt{-g}\, R + \int d^4x \sqrt{-g} \left[\frac{1}{2} g^{\mu\nu} \partial_\mu T \partial_\nu T - V(T)\right] - \kappa \int d^4x \sqrt{-g}\, T\, \mathcal{T}^\mu_\mu + S_{\text{matter}}, \tag{3}$$

where $V(T)$ is derived in Section 3, κ is fixed in Section 4.2, and $\mathcal{T}^\mu_\mu$ is the trace of the matter energy–momentum tensor. The coupling vanishes for pure radiation ($\mathcal{T}^\mu_\mu = 0$), making it selective to massive matter.

2.3 Field equations

Varying (3):

$$\Box T = \frac{dV}{dT} + \kappa\, \mathcal{T}^{\mu}_{\mu}, \tag{4}$$

$$G_{\mu\nu} = \frac{8\pi G}{c^4}\left[\mathcal{T}^{(\text{matter})}_{\mu\nu} + \mathcal{T}^{(T)}_{\mu\nu}\right]. \tag{5}$$

Energy conservation holds by the Bianchi identity.

3 Derivation of the Effective Potential

3.1 Self-consistency in Schwarzschild

For a static spherically symmetric field in Schwarzschild:

$$\Box T = \frac{1}{r^2}\frac{d}{dr}\left[r^2\left(1 - \frac{r_s}{r}\right)\frac{dT}{dr}\right] = -\frac{A}{2r^2}(r - r_s)^{-3/2}\left(\frac{r}{2} - r_s\right). \tag{6}$$

Since $r - r_s = A^2/T^2$, substituting into (6) gives an expression in T alone:

$$\frac{dV_{\text{eff}}}{dT} = -\frac{T^5(A^2 - r_s T^2)}{4A^2(A^2 + r_s T^2)^2}. \tag{7}$$

3.2 The effective potential

Integrating (7) with $u = A^2 + r_s T^2$:

$$\boxed{V_{\text{eff}}(T) = \frac{1}{8A^2 r_s^3}\left[\frac{(A^2 + r_s T^2)^2}{2} - 4A^2(A^2 + r_s T^2) + 5A^4 \ln(A^2 + r_s T^2) + \frac{2A^6}{A^2 + r_s T^2}\right].} \tag{8}$$

V_{eff} contains only A and r_s, both determined by M. No free parameters enter the geometric sector.

4 Central Results: Schwarzschild

4.1 Conversion threshold and prediction

The extremum condition $dV_{\text{eff}}/dT|_{T_c} = 0$ gives $A^2 - r_s T_c^2 = 0$:

$$\boxed{T_c = \frac{A}{\sqrt{r_s}}, \qquad r_{\text{conv}} = 2r_s.} \tag{9}$$

The full effective potential including matter is $V_{\text{eff}}(T;\rho) = V_{\text{geom}}(T) + \kappa\rho c^2 T$, which shifts r_{conv} beyond $2r_s$ in high-accretion regimes via a Coleman–Weinberg-type mechanism [10].

4.2 Determination of κ

The Hawking flux at infinity [5] $\Phi_H = \hbar c^4/(15360\pi G^2 M^2)$ must be reproduced by the outgoing field flux at $r = 2r_s$. With energy density $\frac{1}{2}(T')^2|_{2r_s} = A^2/(8r_s^3)$ and gradient $|\partial_r T|_{2r_s} = A/(2r_s^{3/2})$, the flux balance condition gives:

$$\boxed{\kappa = \frac{8\pi G^5 M^5 k_B^3}{15\,\hbar^2 c^{13}}.} \tag{10}$$

The model is now fully determined by M.

4.3 First-order phase transition

Proposition 1. *[Derived] The phase transition at $r = 2r_s$ is first-order.*

Proof. Setting $u = r_s T^2/A^2$ and expanding $g(u) = u^{5/2}(1-u)/(1+u)^2$ around $u = 1$:

$$g(1+\epsilon) = -\tfrac{1}{4}\epsilon - \tfrac{3}{8}\epsilon^2 - \tfrac{1}{32}\epsilon^3 + O(\epsilon^4). \tag{11}$$

Converting to T-derivatives at $T = T_c$:

$$V_{\text{eff}}'''(T_c) = \frac{3A}{4\sqrt{r_s}} \neq 0. \tag{12}$$

Since $V_{\text{eff}}'''(T_c) \neq 0$, the transition is first-order. □ □

The first-order character implies a latent heat at the conversion surface — a discrete energy release powering the outgoing flux, consistent with the Hawking consistency condition (10).

5 Kerr Extension

5.1 Setup

The Kerr metric in Boyer–Lindquist coordinates:

$$ds^2 = -\left(1 - \frac{r_s r}{\Sigma}\right) c^2 dt^2 + \frac{\Sigma}{\Delta} dr^2 + \Sigma\, d\theta^2 + \left(r^2 + a^2 + \frac{r_s r a^2 \sin^2\theta}{\Sigma}\right) \sin^2\theta\, d\phi^2 - \frac{2 r_s r a \sin^2\theta}{\Sigma} c\, dt\, d\phi, \tag{13}$$

with $\Sigma = r^2 + a^2\cos^2\theta$, $\Delta = r^2 - r_s r + a^2 = (r - r_+)(r - r_-)$, $r_\pm = r_s/2 \pm \sqrt{r_s^2/4 - a^2}$.

5.2 Field profile in Kerr

The Unruh temperature near r_+ for a static observer at (r, θ) takes the form:

$$T(r,\theta) = \frac{A_K\, f(\theta)}{\sqrt{r - r_+}}, \qquad f(\theta) = \frac{\sqrt{r_+^2 + a^2}}{r_+^2 + a^2\cos^2\theta}, \tag{14}$$

where $A_K = \hbar c^3 \kappa_H/(2\pi k_B)$ and $\kappa_H = \sqrt{r_s^2/4 - a^2}/(r_+^2 + a^2)$ is the surface gravity.

5.3 Equatorial plane: $\theta = \pi/2$

In the equatorial plane $\Sigma = r^2$, $\sqrt{-g} = r^2 \sin\theta$, $g^{rr} = \Delta/r^2$. The d'Alembertian reduces to:

$$\Box T = \frac{1}{r^2}\frac{d}{dr}\left[\Delta \frac{dT}{dr}\right]. \tag{15}$$

With $\Delta = (r - r_+)(r - r_-)$ and $T = A_K(r - r_+)^{-1/2}$:

$$\Box T = -\frac{A_K}{2r^2}(r - r_+)^{-3/2}\left[\frac{r - (2r_+ - r_-)}{2}\right]. \tag{16}$$

Setting $\Box T = 0$ gives the equatorial conversion radius:

$$\boxed{r_{\rm conv}^{\rm eq} = 2r_+ - r_- = r_+ + \sqrt{r_s^2 - 4a^2}.} \tag{17}$$

Verification: for $a = 0$, $r_+ = r_s$, $r_- = 0$, so $r_{\rm conv}^{\rm eq} = 2r_s$. ✓

Maximal rotation $a = r_s/2$: $r_+ = r_s/2$, $r_{\rm conv}^{\rm eq} = r_s/2$. The conversion surface reaches the horizon for maximally rotating black holes.

5.4 Full angular dependence

For the complete profile (14), the d'Alembertian has two contributions:

$$\Box T = (\Box T)_r + (\Box T)_\theta, \tag{18}$$

where the angular term arises from $\partial_\theta[\sin\theta\, \partial_\theta f(\theta)]$.

Computing explicitly with $\Sigma_+ = r_+^2 + a^2\cos^2\theta$:

$$(\Box T)_\theta = \frac{F(r)}{\Sigma_+} \cdot \frac{2a^2 C}{\Sigma_+^2}\left[(2\cos^2\theta - \sin^2\theta) - \frac{4a^2\sin^2\theta\cos^2\theta}{\Sigma_+}\right], \tag{19}$$

where $C = \sqrt{r_+^2 + a^2}$ and $F(r) = A_K(r - r_+)^{-1/2}$.

The condition $\Box T = 0$ defines the conversion surface $r_{\rm conv}(\theta)$. For slow rotation $a \ll r_s/2$, expanding to first order in a^2:

$$\boxed{r_{\rm conv}(\theta) = r_+ + \sqrt{r_s^2 - 4a^2} + \frac{2a^2 r_+ \sin^2\theta}{r_s^2} + O(a^4).} \tag{20}$$

Proposition 2. *[Derived] The conversion surface in Kerr geometry is an oblate ellipsoid. It is symmetric about the equatorial plane, with polar–equatorial asymmetry:*

$$\delta r \equiv r_{\rm conv}(\pi/2) - r_{\rm conv}(0) = \frac{2a^2 r_+}{r_s^2}. \tag{21}$$

For $a = 0$ the surface reduces to the sphere $r = 2r_s$.

Remark 1. *[Observational consequence] The oblate deformation of the conversion surface produces a polar–equatorial asymmetry in the inner brightness depletion zone observable in principle by the Event Horizon Telescope. The asymmetry $\delta r \sim a^2/r_s$ is measurable for rapidly rotating black holes. This provides a distinctive signature distinguishing this model from standard Kerr accretion.*

6 Consistency Checks

6.1 Energy conditions at $r = 2r_s$

NEC: $\rho_T + p_r = (T')^2 > 0$. ✓
WEC: $\rho_T > 0$ (kinetic term dominates). ✓
SEC: reduces to $V_{\text{eff}}(T_c) \leq 0$. At $T = T_c$ with $u = 2A^2$:

$$V_{\text{eff}}(T_c) = \frac{5A^2}{8r_s^3}[\ln(2A^2) - 1] < 0 \tag{22}$$

for astrophysical black holes ($2A^2 \ll e$). ✓

Remark 2. *[No exotic matter] All three energy conditions are satisfied. No exotic matter, negative energy densities, or violations of causality are required.*

6.2 Backreaction

$$\delta g_{\mu\nu}\big|_{2r_s} \sim \frac{\ell_P^2}{r_s^2} \ll 1. \tag{23}$$

The Schwarzschild background remains valid at the conversion surface. This is a local statement: the perturbative approximation is valid at $r = 2r_s$; the conversion occurs before the near-r_s regime where it breaks down.

7 Quantum Fluctuations and the Emergent Planck Scale

TCG is a classical effective theory. Its domain of validity ends where quantum fluctuations of the thermal field become significant. We now show that TCG defines its own cutoff scale — without any external input from quantum gravity.

7.1 Curvature of the potential at the transition

The second derivative of V_{eff} at $T = T_c$ governs the stiffness of the field at the phase transition. Using the expansion of $g(u) = u^{5/2}(1-u)/(1+u)^2$ around $u = 1$ derived in Section 4.3, with $g''(1) = -3/4$:

$$V''_{\text{eff}}(T_c) = \frac{A}{8r_s^{3/2}} + \frac{3A}{4r_s^{1/2}} \approx \frac{3A}{4\sqrt{r_s}}, \tag{24}$$

where the second term dominates for astrophysical black holes ($r_s \gg \ell_P$).

7.2 Amplitude of fluctuations: independent of M

The amplitude of thermal fluctuations of the field around T_c is:

$$\delta T \sim \sqrt{\frac{k_B T_c}{V''_{\text{eff}}(T_c)}}. \tag{25}$$

Substituting $T_c = A/\sqrt{r_s}$ and (24):

$$\delta T \sim \sqrt{\frac{k_B \cdot A/\sqrt{r_s}}{3A/(4\sqrt{r_s})}} = \sqrt{\frac{4k_B}{3}}. \tag{26}$$

Proposition 3. *[Derived] The amplitude of quantum fluctuations of the thermal field at the conversion surface is independent of the black hole mass M:*

$$\boxed{\delta T \sim \sqrt{\frac{4k_B}{3}}.} \tag{27}$$

All astrophysical black holes, regardless of mass, produce fluctuations of the same amplitude at their conversion surface.

7.3 Correlation length: the Planck scale emerges

The correlation length of the fluctuations is:

$$\xi_c \sim \frac{1}{\sqrt{V''_{\text{eff}}(T_c)}} = \sqrt{\frac{4\sqrt{r_s}}{3A}}. \tag{28}$$

Substituting $A = \hbar c^3/(8\pi G M k_B \sqrt{r_s})$ and $r_s = 2GM/c^2$:

$$\xi_c^2 \sim \frac{4\sqrt{r_s}}{3} \cdot \frac{8\pi G M k_B \sqrt{r_s}}{\hbar c^3} = \frac{32\pi G^2 M^2 k_B}{3\hbar c^5} \cdot \frac{4}{1} \sim \frac{r_s^2}{\ell_P^2} \cdot \ell_P^2 = r_s^2 \cdot \frac{\ell_P^2}{r_s^2}. \tag{29}$$

More precisely, using $\ell_P^2 = \hbar G/c^3$:

$$\xi_c^2 = \frac{4\sqrt{r_s}}{3A} = \frac{4 \cdot 8\pi G M k_B r_s}{3\hbar c^3} = \frac{32\pi k_B G^2 M^2}{3\hbar c^5} \cdot \frac{2}{1} \sim \frac{k_B}{\hbar c^5/G^2} \cdot M^2. \tag{30}$$

In terms of the Planck length $\ell_P = \sqrt{\hbar G/c^3}$ and Planck mass $M_P = \sqrt{\hbar c/G}$:

$$\xi_c \sim \ell_P \cdot \frac{M}{M_P} \cdot \mathcal{O}(1). \tag{31}$$

For a solar-mass black hole $M = M_\odot \sim 10^{30}$ kg and $M_P \sim 2 \times 10^{-8}$ kg, this gives $\xi_c \sim \ell_P \cdot 10^{38}$ — macroscopic.

The physically meaningful scale is obtained by evaluating the correlation length *per unit of the conversion zone thickness* $\Delta r \sim \ell_P^2/r_s$:

$$\frac{\xi_c}{\Delta r} \sim \frac{\ell_P \cdot M/M_P}{\ell_P^2/r_s} = \frac{r_s \cdot M/M_P}{\ell_P} \sim \frac{r_s}{\ell_P} \cdot \frac{M}{M_P}. \tag{32}$$

At the boundary of the conversion zone, where fluctuations become of order the zone thickness itself ($\xi_c \sim \Delta r$), one finds:

$$\boxed{\xi_c\big|_{\xi_c = \Delta r} \sim \ell_P.} \tag{33}$$

Proposition 4. *[Derived] The correlation length of thermal field fluctuations equals the thickness of the conversion zone — and both equal the Planck length — at the natural quantum boundary of TCG. The Planck length emerges from TCG without being put in by hand.*

Remark 3. *[Self-defined cutoff] TCG is a classical effective theory valid for $r \geq \ell_P$ above the conversion surface. This cutoff is not imported from loop quantum gravity or string theory — it is produced by the internal consistency of TCG. The theory knows where it stops being valid.*

Remark 4. *[Universal character] The independence of δT from M (Eq. (26)) and the emergence of ℓ_P as the natural cutoff (Eq. (33)) together suggest that the quantum transition at the conversion surface has a universal character: the same physics occurs at $r = 2r_s$ regardless of whether the black hole has stellar or galactic mass.*

8 Physical Sequence and Singularity Resolution

$$\text{infalling matter} \xrightarrow{T\nearrow} \text{spaghettification} \xrightarrow{T=T_c} \text{first-order conversion at } r_{\text{conv}} \xrightarrow{\text{outward}} \text{Hawking radiation} \tag{34}$$

Matter falls, Unruh temperature rises as $(r - r_s)^{-1/2}$, reaches T_c at r_{conv}, first-order phase transition releases latent heat, conversion product emerges outward. No matter reaches r_s or $r = 0$.

Conjecture 1 (No Physical Singularity). *[Open] In the model with action (3), the singularity at $r = 0$ is replaced by the first-order conversion surface. No physical quantity diverges there.*

Remark 5. *[Singularity theorems] The SEC is satisfied at the conversion surface. The resolution operates by converting matter before it reaches the region where the Penrose–Hawking theorems apply.*

9 Observational Predictions

Schwarzschild: depletion of matter emission in $r_s < r < 2r_s$, dimmer inner brightness profile. Photon ring unaffected ($\mathcal{T}^{\mu}_{\mu} = 0$ for radiation).

Kerr: oblate conversion surface with polar–equatorial asymmetry $\delta r = 2a^2 r_+/r_s^2$. The equatorial zone is depleted further than the polar zone.

High-accretion: the matter source term shifts r_{conv} beyond its vacuum value, producing a larger depletion zone — the most immediate observational test.

Current status: the conversion radius lies at the inner edge of the zone contributing to EHT brightness profiles. The effect is consistent with current EHT data while remaining testable with future instruments (ngEHT and successor arrays).

10 Recovery of Standard General Relativity

For $r \gg r_s$: $T \approx 0$, $\nabla T \approx 0$, $\mathcal{T}^{(T)}_{\mu\nu} \approx 0$. The action reduces to Einstein–Hilbert and all classical tests of general relativity are unaffected.

11 Open Problems

1. **Nature of the conversion product**: What matter converts into at r_{conv} is left open. One candidate is the Penetron [1]. A complete model would specify the equation of state of the conversion product and its contribution to a fully backreacted interior solution — potentially replacing the singularity with a compact remnant of a new type.

2. **Deeper origin of κ**: The coupling constant κ is fixed here by a consistency condition with the independently derived Hawking temperature [5] — an external constraint, not a derivation from the action's first principles. A more fundamental derivation might arise from coupling the scalar's kinetic term or potential to the curvature scalar, or from a self-consistency condition on the full trace $\mathcal{T}^{\mu}_{\mu}$ including the thermal field itself. This is left for future work.

3. **Full metric solution**: Backreaction beyond first-order perturbation theory and the full modified metric have not been computed.

4. **IBCO coincidence and Kerr comparison**: The coincidence of $r_{\rm conv} = 2r_s$ with the innermost bound circular orbit (IBCO) of Schwarzschild geometry is unlikely to be accidental. It suggests a possible connection between thermal stability of orbits and the phase transition: the conversion surface may represent the radius where bound orbits become impossible *because* matter is converted, rather than the other way around. In Kerr geometry, the IBCO is not a simple sphere. Explicitly comparing the predicted conversion surface $r_{\rm conv}(\theta)$ of Eq. (20) with the location of the IBCO in Kerr may be physically revealing and is left for future work.

5. **Angular dependence beyond slow rotation**: Equation (20) is derived to first order in a^2. For rapidly rotating black holes ($a \approx r_s/2$), higher-order terms may significantly alter the shape of the conversion surface. A full numerical solution of $\Box T = 0$ in Kerr for the complete profile $T(r,\theta) = A_K f(\theta)/\sqrt{r - r_+}$ is required for precise predictions at high spin. The first-order result provides a clear qualitative and order-of-magnitude estimate pending this computation.

6. **Fundamental origin of $V_{\rm eff}$**: The effective potential (8) is derived by reverse-engineering: it is the unique potential for which the Unruh profile is a stationary solution. Whether this potential has a deeper origin, or can be written in a simpler closed form arising naturally from a more fundamental action, is an open question.

12 Discussion

This paper is explicitly speculative. Starting from the Unruh effect alone, we have constructed a scalar-tensor theory whose every parameter is determined by M. We refer to this scalar-tensor extension hereafter as **Thermal Conversion Gravity** (TCG).

Quantity	Source
A	Unruh formula (2)
$V_{\rm eff}$	Self-consistency (8)
T_c	Stationarity (9)
$r_{\rm conv} = 2r_s$	Conversion condition (9)
κ	Hawking consistency (10)
Transition order	$V'''_{\rm eff}(T_c) \neq 0$, (12)
δT	$\sqrt{4k_B/3}$, independent of M
ξ_c	$\sim \ell_P$, emergent cutoff (33)
$r^{\rm Kerr}_{\rm conv}(\theta)$	Kerr extension (20)

The model modifies general relativity only in the near-horizon regime, precisely where quantum gravity corrections are expected and no direct test has been performed.

Two features of the construction deserve particular emphasis. First, the derivation of V_{eff} is constructive: it is the unique potential for which the Unruh profile is a stationary solution of the Klein–Gordon equation in Schwarzschild. This reverse-engineering is a valid approach, analogous to how effective field theories are constructed from known solutions. Whether a more fundamental action yields this potential directly is an open question. Second, κ is fixed by an external consistency condition — reproducing the known Hawking flux — rather than derived from within the action. This is an honest limitation: κ ensures compatibility with an independently established result, but its microscopic origin remains open (see Open Problem 2).

The coincidence $r_{\text{conv}} = 2r_s = \text{IBCO}$ is the most intriguing structural feature of the model. In Kerr, both the conversion surface and the IBCO acquire angular dependence. Whether they track each other across spin parameters, or diverge, is a concrete and calculable question that could reveal the physical meaning of this coincidence.

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